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UNCLAS KINGSTON 001289

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

WHA/CAR (BENT), INL/LP (KBROWN), DS/IP/ITA

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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: POLICE OFFICERS CALL OUT SICK

1. (U) On Monday, May 9, angry Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) officers blocked Finance Minister Omar Davies from leaving the Ministry of Finance and Planning building in an attempt to force the Minister to respond within 48 hours to the officers, demands for a 47 percent wage increase. Davies, who was en route to a Cabinet meeting, was then forced into the Heroes, Circle complex (a park across from the Ministry of Finance) where he was handed a police microphone and addressed the protestors, agreeing to a meeting with the Police Federation. Only then was the Minister allowed to leave. JCF Commissioner Lucius Thomas has called an investigation into the officers, actions.

2. (SBU) The Police Federation and the Ministry of Finance have been at an impasse for more than a year over JCF,s request for a 47 percent wage increase, provisions for better working conditions, increased access to training opportunities and improved health benefits. The government insists that it cannot offer more than a three per cent hike, the maximum under a 2004 Memorandum of Understanding with public sector workers. A meeting between Davies and the Police Federation on May 12 did not resolve the matter and at midnight on May 17, JCF officers began to call in sick. RSO has confirmed that there is not a wide scale "sick-out" on the island; however, if talks continue to break down and demands are not met, some officers are adamant that they will have no option but to resort to protest.

3. (U) The Prime Minister will meet with trade union leaders today to assist in resolving this matter. Minister of National Security Peter Phillips and JCF Commissioner Lucius Thomas are also meeting today to seek ways to avoid a full scale protest by JCF officers.  
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